

Foster Parents

Changing Lives One Child at a Time



Simply stated, thank you.

As foster parents, you are not told often enough the value of your work. By taking children into your homes – and often your hearts – you perform one of the most important and meaningful jobs in society. Because of people like you, thousands of children in our state are living a better life than the one from which they came. Many find permanent homes in which to live and grow.

To help you in caring for children, Children's Administration is doing a number of things we hope will help better support you and connect you to us and to other foster parents as team members. Many activities are tied to the statewide plan to improve the child welfare system called Kids Come First – Phase II.

One of the first and best steps we can take is to keep you well informed about important foster care issues, events and policy changes. This letter is an example of that. We will be sending out regular updates through the payment system. Please take a few minutes to read them so that you can have the most recent and accurate information.

Ways we will be communicating

Listserve – Getting easily accessible information to you

We have set up an electronic Listserve on which we will regularly be sending out information and links to other sites we hope you will find useful. If you sign up for this free service, we promise we won't overwhelm you with massive amounts of electronic mail. We will let you know what is happening with the proposed improvements to the child welfare system and how to connect with them, if you want. We will update you on events such as the statewide foster parent conference, upcoming training opportunities, changes in foster care policies and procedures, and other important information.

<http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=fosterparents&&A=1> is the electronic address through which you can sign up and start receiving information. If you want assistance signing up for the list serve, please call or e-mail Bob Partlow (360-902-8063, pbob300@dshs.wa.gov) or David de la Fuente (360-902-7976, dedr300@dshs.wa.gov).

Web Site – Information Central

We are working toward a more user-friendly foster parent website, which will contain information from the listserve, links to foster parent training and how to become a foster parent, and other important news and updates. In addition to current news items about issues in foster care, it will contain relevant information about policies. The website address is <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/>

Snail Mail – U.S. Postal Service

We also will connect with you by regular mail. We will use that less frequently because we know you get a lot of mail from us already; it is costly to send and electronic communication is quicker and more efficient. But not everyone has e-mail, so we will continue to use the Postal Service from time to time.

Important changes and improvements

Support Systems – You are not alone

There are times when foster parenting can be a very isolating experience so it is crucial you feel supported when this happens. To help provide more support, the state has contracted with Families for Kids, a branch of Lutheran Community Services, to hire foster parent liaisons former or current foster parents. Liaisons will help connect to support systems in your local area which are specifically designed to provide the type of support you need. This includes exchanging respite care, having another foster parent to talk with, getting help negotiating the foster care system, learning about training, and exchanging resources like clothes, blankets, car seats, etc.). FFK's number is 888-794-1794. Their website is www.familiesforkids.org. In Kitsap and Pierce counties contact Foster Care Resource Network for recruitment and support services at 253-473-9252.

FIRST Telephone Line – Another Place For Support

Sometimes foster parents have the need for someone to listen to them and work with them if they are the subject of allegations by children in their care. A special line has been established to provide that support. Experienced foster parents can help guide you through what may be a difficult period. When you need assistance in this situation, call 253-219-6782. Someone can take your calls from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday. You can also leave a message, which will be returned within 48 hours.

Recruitment – Know someone who is interested in being a foster parent?

If you know someone who wants to become a foster parent or is interested in learning about foster parenting, please have them call 1-800-760-5340. That will connect them to the YMCA of Greater Seattle, which runs this toll-free number for recruitment. The YMCA also can be contacted via the web at whyfoster@seattleyymca.org. Potential foster parents will get a response within 24 hours. The YMCA has recruiters throughout the state, who are current or former foster parents. The recruiters can talk first-hand about foster parenting and guide potential foster parents through licensing.

Preview of Coming Attractions

Work is being done by staff at Children's Administration on literally dozens of items that affect foster parents. Most are being done through Kids Come First, the state's federally approved comprehensive reform plan.

Among them are policies related to:

- More regular face-to-face contact between social workers and foster parents
- Prompt return of telephone calls
- Developing and providing more detailed information about children in your care
- Contact every three months to touch base with you about how you are doing
- Improved notification to you about meetings and court hearings that involve the children in your care

More detailed information about these issues and others is on the Kids Come First web site, which can be reached through http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/about/imp_kcf2.asp.

If you want more information about anything you have read here or other issues, you can contact your local Children's Administration office. You can also reach Bob Partlow at 360-902-8063 or David de la Fuente at 360-902-7976. Contact names and numbers will be posted on the Listserve and the foster parent website. We would also be interested in hearing any ideas you have for communicating with you more directly.